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Activating the heart: Storytelling, knowledge sharing and relationship is a collection containing eight chapters written by participants at a workshop by the same title held at Yellowknife and Dettah, Northwest Territories, Canada in 2012. The guiding thread throughout this volume is “how storytelling advances responsibility and relationship at the local, national, and global levels” (p. xiii). Quoting from the publisher’s blurb: “*Activating the Heart* is an exploration of storytelling as a tool for knowledge production and sharing to build new connections between people and their histories, environments, and cultural geographies. The collection pays particular attention to the significance of storytelling in Indigenous knowledge frameworks and extends into other ways of knowing in works where scholars have embraced narrative and story as a part of their research approach.” The chapters are organized into three sections (“Storytelling to understand”, “Storytelling to share”, and “Storytelling to create”); inside each section, there are subtle echoes across chapters. One of the running threads of Section 1 is the simple, fundamental notion of *listening*. The bare root (‘listen’) is framed in a picture at the outset of Chapter 2 (p. 29): a bird (Crow or Raven: a bird of secrets and creation in Na-Dene folk lore; a counterpoint to Poe’s bird of ill omen) enjoining the onlooker to “listen”. Are we ready for *disquieting* journeys like those described in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3: listening to tales, and to sounds, *on their own terms*?



It is not immediately clear what could be at stake in a review of this book, because the volume is replete with self-reflexive analyses. The editors frame the goals and achievements with remarkable clarity, providing not only a general overview but also chapter-by-chapter commentary, both in the Introduction and the Conclusion. Thus, my primary aim in writing this review is not to attempt a “digest”, but to point out the relevance of the book to an audience that extends far beyond those who are interested in languages and cultures of Canada. The book is written by a small group of people with a shared commitment to Indigenous communities in Canada, but it achieves its goal “to engage diverse audiences and inspire change” (p. xi). The diversity of the contributors’ backgrounds is no doubt key to this success (see e.g., p. ix, “[t]his collection started as a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary conversation over three days”). The volume conveys the feel of this exchange: It is extraordinarily fresh and vivid, giving the reader a sense of being invited to participate in the explorations described by the contributors.

Chapter 1, “Finding my way: emotions and ethics in community-based action research with indigenous communities”, by Leonie Sandercock, is a self-reflexive narrative in free verse about how the author travelled to Burns Lake, British Columbia, to conduct research:

in my depth of immigrant ignorance and
still unacknowledged white privilege and
with all my radical planning baggage intact,
I begin a journey of confronting
Indigenous Canada, and
reluctantly but inevitably,
also myself. (pp. 7–8)

The intense, incandescent text may remind some readers of the French poet Rimbaud settling his accounts with his education and his time in *A Season in Hell*, but a fundamental difference is that Leonie Sandercock conveys a hopeful message: her narrative is one of meaningful encounter. Whereas the original print of Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer* was left undistributed (printed at author’s cost: the price printed on the volume was *one franc*, which is the price of symbolic compensation), Leonie Sandercock’s prose poem is for sharing, and does not refrain from spelling out conclusions and issuing recommendations.

The dance of getting to know
taking the time many stumbles
missed steps missed cues
not listening not watching
being made fun of kindly
observing other ways of teaching
discarding preconceptions
discovering three dimensions. (p. 17)

A prologue, an epilogue, and a note on sources frame the prose poem. They ensure that this chapter makes its rich contents approachable for a wider audience. The bibliography provides pointers to a selection of similarly informative and experience-laden references.

Chapter 2, “Notes from the UNDERBRIDGE”, by Christine Stewart with Jacquie Leggatt, could likewise have been written as a long poem – the form which Christine Stewart (a professor of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta) chose for her book *Treaty 6 Deixis*, published in the same year (Stewart 2018). Like Leonie Sandercock, Christine Stewart is a non-Indigenous person reflecting on her situation and her relationships to the land and its Indigenous inhabitants. Christine Stewart’s experiences relate to Treaty 6 land, an area concerned by a treaty signed in 1876, which encompasses most of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Specifically, the UNDERBRIDGE is a place under a bridge in Edmonton, Alberta, where a number of homeless people live, many of them Nêhiyaw (Cree), “on their traditional territory, Treaty 6 – home and yet homeless” (p. 30). Meanwhile, “[f]or the most part, above the ravine, life for the homeowners, joggers, dog walkers, and cyclists went on as usual” (p. 30). With Jacquie Leggatt, a composer, Christine Stewart progresses from an initial encounter where “[o]ur listening ears are rife with discord, disruption; we cannot proceed without pain” (p. 35) to a point where a sense of “healing (profane, disrupting, mending, splitting)” emerges. Listening is key: “In listening, we divide and recombine as subjects, mending and merging in new relationships” (p. 36), practising “listening as a potentially more precise and holistic way of attending to place” (p. 30). Recordings are available over the Internet, allowing readers to start on the same journey:

Perhaps I could listen, practise the possibilities of listening – not as a conventional researcher, a detached subject, but as a body next to other bodies, ‘all ears’? Might I learn notes of significance? Welcome the indiscernible, accepting other compositions, and other frameworks of reference? (p. 33)

In my experience listening to the online recordings, the sense of encounter and discovery prevails over the sense of noise and discomfort that I had expected. The recordings do not fall short of their ambitious goal, to “turn towards deep zones of engagement, to hear the oral histories of Indigenous nations and scholars and communities to attend to this land, this ravine and its resonances” (p. 41).

Chapter 3, “Re-valuing code-switching: lessons from Kaska narrative performances”, by Patrick Moore, makes an enlightening case for the interest of examining code-switching (in this instance, between Kaska and English) as a narrative device, instead of considering the presence of passages in another (“intrusive”) language as a pollutant, as many linguists (including this reviewer) unwittingly tend to do. “Even scholars working with indigenous languages often regard code-switching to English as a form of contamination and a precursor of language shift” (p. 66). This is an important warning to fieldworkers: When scholars “encourage storytellers to speak one language exclusively, exclude dual-language narratives from their work, or elim-

inate code-switching through editing as they prepare stories for publication” (p. 66), they are introducing a bias into the data. “Diversity linguists” are aware that “texts are the lifeblood of linguistic fieldwork” (Dixon 2007:22); they should also become aware that the observer’s more or less conscious disdain for code-switching can affect data collection, preventing him/her (and people using the data in the future) from noticing important features of the narratives. Patrick Moore’s close attention to the workings of Kaska narratives reveals what should have been clear from the outset: English words and sentences in a Kaska narrative need not be rejected on principle as contamination of a native stock, any more than the auditory environment from the Mill Creek Underbridge (discussed in Chapter 2) needs to be sorted on principle into (bad) noise and (good) sound.

Patrick Moore provides a narrative of the life course of the storytellers to shed light on their use of code-switching, bringing out “creative aspects of dual-language narrative performance” (p. 58). Thus, examination of John Dickson’s narratives shows that “[o]ften his narrative uses [of English] aligned with and enhanced established Kaska narrative techniques that undoubtedly predate the use of English” (p. 61). Repetition, a common device in storytelling, gains a new dimension from the use of two languages, which allows for “echo translations, repetitions that switch languages” (p. 61). This chapter intertwines (i) insightful analyses of examples, (ii) generalizations such as the association of code-switching with some characters in the stories rather than others, and (iii) remarks about proposed general models of code-switching. Typologists and specialists of language contact will be especially interested by observations such as that “[c]ode-switching Kaska storytellers such as John Dickson make use of two main strategies to satisfy the grammars of both Kaska and English while conveying key narrative cues, and their dual language use doesn’t appear to be constrained by Myers-Scotton’s proposed universals” (p. 59). This chapter, which contains two Kaska stories (by Maudie Dick and John Dickson), has great relevance for a range of audiences, from linguists who specialize in the study of language contact (they will discover captivating examples of code-switching between structurally very different languages, with detailed analyses) to storytellers (they could read the chapter as an encouragement to “re-value code-switching” in their own practice) to field linguists and anthropologists who could likewise re-value code-switching in their fieldwork plans and have their appetite whetted for the interesting literature available on this topic (e.g., Gullberg 2012).

Chapter 4, “Art, heart, and health: experiences from northern British Columbia”, by Kendra Mitchell-Foster and Sarah de Leeuw, explores ways in which arts-based storytelling practises build relationships between the often disparate communities of First Nations in this area, health researchers, and future physicians. ArtDays are a series of events co-organized by the staff of a health centre, undergraduate medical students and faculty, and graduate students from a Community Health Science Programme, aiming to bridge the divides that currently exist between a health care system and research paradigm of predominantly non-Indigenous values, practices, and modes of care, on the one hand, and Indigenous world views and understandings of health, on the other. In the environment of ArtDays, creative expression is used

to dismantle the conventional power dynamics of interactions between community members and health care practitioners: Narratives are used as a tool for health care professionals to reflect on their own practices and to understand events in the light of personal relationships. A central idea is to work towards positive and non-deficit-based approaches to understanding health. Key terms include “health arts”, “medical humanities”, “cultural safety”, and “cultural humility” (p. 94).

Like many other contributors to the volume, the authors live out strong personal commitments: “Kendra relocated with her family to Prince George, British Columbia, in 2013 as part of an intentional realigning of a daily way of life with values like family, hospitality, community, and justice. [...] Sarah has spent most of her life in northern places, combining creativity (the literary arts) with political action” (pp. 92–93).

Chapter 5, “‘Grandson, / This is meat’: hunting metonymy in François Mandeville’s *This is what they say*”, by Jasmine Spencer, is a literary study of stories told in Chipewyan by François Mandeville and other storytellers from his community. These stories were collected by the linguist Li Fang-Kuei, who noted that Mandeville “possessed the extraordinary ability to dictate texts and to explain forms with lucidity and patience” (Li 1964:132). After presenting Mandeville and mentioning his historic collaboration with Li, Jasmine Spencer focuses on the theme of hunting. The author builds on Robert Bringhurst’s comment that Mandeville’s tales of hunters and animals “are Athabaskan [Dene] metaphysics incarnate” (p. 120) to provide metaphorical elaboration on the rich ethnological topic of hunting. Hunters kill animals for their flesh; in her study, J. Spencer hunts for “the flesh of the narrative” (p. 124). Wielding tools of contemporary literary criticism with virtuosity, she suggests that narratives can be seen as bodies that “‘ingest’ – and sometimes regurgitate – the stuff of their own making” (p. 121). The chapter provides an example of how intense an evocation of Indigenous narratives can be offered from the standpoint of contemporary literature studies. The profuse use of terms from literary criticism gives this chapter a somewhat different feel from the rest of the volume, and readers who are novice in this field may struggle with some of the technical vocabulary and the references to Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Jacobson, Rancière, Deleuze, Lévi-Strauss, and more.¹ However, the subject-matter (Dene stories) offers a possible entry point into this chapter for readers with less familiarity with literary studies or less attraction to exuberant rhetorics.

The chapters in Section 3 investigate “Storytelling to create”. Chapter 6 is a one-page poem by Rita Wong, “sleepless in Somba K’e”, which draws inspiration from the waters surrounding Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, to explore dimensions of community and environmental issues. The absence of an initial capital in the poem’s title awakens curiosity. Rita Wong chose to reserve capitals for the *named entities* that

¹Here is one of the sentences where I felt that the critical flourish was harmful to the clarity of the writing: “In analyzing the presence of caribou and moose in Mandeville’s cycle, I hope to trace an emergent set of textually salient cultural frames for these animals – and thus to come to understand better their motivic blending through metaphorical referencing; in this way, I hope eventually to touch upon and to touch narrative animals as carnal matrices of Mandeville’s story cycle, where life and death – predation and perpetuation, affinity and affiliation – are worked out in mythopoetic ways” (p. 127).

constitute the narrative's characters. These are: the Coney River, to which the piece is dedicated ("*for the Coney River, otherwise known as the Yellowknife River*"), Somba K'e (a park in Yellowknife), the eleven different languages spoken on its banks (listed in full, with suspension points to keep the inventory open), the Giant Gold Mine and the Ekati diamond mine and De Beers, and the last name (and last word) in the chapter: Yamozha. I will let you look up this last name for yourself in case you do not yet know it and you are interested in the chapter's concluding question: "what will we learn from crowberry, blueberry, cloudberry, yarrow, caribou, whitefish, Yamozha?"

Chapter 7, "Old Rawhide died" by Bren Kolson, is a testimony to the power of storytelling and its importance in our lives. It recounts childhood memories of listening to radio voice characters: "I lived for Saturday nights to listen to Old Rawhide's experiences. He was my hero, who took me to radio places I hoped I would one day see and know" (p. 149). The child's fascination with the tales is so intense that the announced death of the (fictional) character, followed a couple of weeks later by his unexpected resurrection and renewed promise of an endless supply of yarns, are turning-points in the child's daily life. Crucially, the tale is not told by a child, but by an adult who recognizes the adult's ties to childhood, understanding childhood to be a key phase in a *continuous* developmental process (Walter 2015). Children are not enigmatic creatures impervious to (adult) logic, living a fanciful life of their own, and in want of *domestication* by adults. Lack of understanding between parents and children stems from parents' anxiety to *do the right thing* and get the child to conform. The narrative clarifies how parents get it plain wrong: The child's depressed mood after hearing of the death of Old Rawhide is seen as a (disquieting) change *for the better* ("What's wrong with her? Never seen her so good...", p. 151), and her awakening from depression and return to activity on hearing of Old Rawhide's resurrection as a change for the worse ("I thought for a while there we were raising the perfect kid. See! See! Look at her! There she goes again!", p. 152). The chapter's last sentence drives the point home: "She [my mother] looked at my father, and my parents stood staring face-to-face, sipping tea, waiting to see who would break the stare and silence to say something about who would first reveal parenting skills about 'tthhhaat kid'" (p. 152). *That kid* knew better all along, and drank in Old Rawhide's message, replete with tall-tale fiction, garrulous disrespect and satire, and healthy advocacy for enjoyment and freedom. By contrast, grown-ups, including a Member of Parliament, considered stifling the voice of Old Rawhide (Max Ferguson) on charges of using "substandard" language and humour.

Thus the chapter narrates the birth of an author and poet. But it can also be read in a number of other ways, of course. For instance, it serves as a healthy reminder that good stories and great voices have power to connect in ways that cross ethnic and cultural boundaries. The child tuned in to Old Rawhide's stories without a need for a stamp of authenticity, any more than she needed a recommendation from her parents, who were unaware of how intensely the child was listening. In fact, to her, part of the stories' appeal was that they were "about the character and homelands of people from lands far away from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and stories about a place like New Found Land [*sic.*]. At age six, I thought Yellowknife,

Northwest Territories, was the only place ever where people lived” (p. 147). In a context where disputes about “cultural appropriation”, accompanied on both sides by “rhetorical tropes of possessive individualism”, tend to “produce more heat than light” (Coombe 1993:253), it is refreshing to read about examples of cultural messages that are passed on (and reinvented to a lesser or greater extent) through unusual or paradoxical channels, as opposed to oral transmission inside a community. A conclusion that I would like to draw from Bren Kolson’s story is that storytellers should not be judged as legitimate or illegitimate based on criteria such as the colour of their skin or their first language.

In the note *About the contributors* (p. 200), I read that Bren Kolson passed away while this volume was in production. But surely, like Old Rawhide’s, Bren’s voice will soon reassure us that “as long as you’re listening, folks, I’ll be here!” (p. 151).

Chapter 8, “Métis storytelling across time and space: situating the personal and academic self between homelands”, by Zoe Todd, is an introspective narrative about how the author uses “storytelling, poetry, and creative non-fiction to engage in complex conversations about responsibility and reciprocity” (p. 153). This is an extremely interesting set of reflections about aspects of research that had traditionally been suppressed as its “backstage”. Sophie Caratini’s reflections on her immersion into cultural and linguistic otherness (Caratini 2004) are another example of how much there is to learn from the anthropologist’s introspection and self-reflection. The poet Michel Deguy describes the relationship to *the field* in anthropology/ethnology as one of anamnesis (recollection of one’s origins): not as a commemoration, but as a historical-mythological quest that reveals the profuse diversity of our *metis* provenance (Deguy 2017:157).²

There are clear threads that run through the entire volume. Two will be discussed here: The first is the book’s central theme (already mentioned at the outset of this review), namely “how storytelling advances responsibility and relationship at the local, national, and global levels”, and the second (which bears strong ties to the first) is *ethics*.

The book’s arguments about the power of stories are articulate and powerful, for instance in Kendra Mitchell-Foster and Sarah de Leeuw’s chapter: They start out from Thomas King’s statement that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 91) and spell out its implications for their work and their lives. This is a message that is not sufficiently heard in our societies, although voiced with great clarity in literature (such as Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* [1990]) and of course by storytellers themselves. Our societies need to listen to stories and storytellers, at a time when social relationships are increasingly hierarchical, and power gaps widen (in terms of economic power and social positions), bringing along a cohort of issues related to domination and lack of accountability. Narratives (especially stories of fulfilment) are increasingly rare, and embroidered on an increasingly narrow canvas, even in academic circles and – not least ironically – among our society’s appointed

²Original text: « Le rapport anthropologique-ethnologique au terrain des ‘terres humaines’ est celui d’une anamnèse non commémorative, mais historique/archéologique/mythologique/toponymique dont la quête, l’enquête, autochtone (ou chthonienne) révèle alors non pas la fixité *identitaire* d’une racine mais la *profuse diversité du profond métissage de la provenance* ! »

healers: in medical circles. As one of many examples, a physician at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor explains why she chose to remain silent on a topic that would have been socially stigmatizing:

I aspire to become a leader in academic medicine. Being cast as a victim would tarnish my narrative. [...] I know that women who report sexual harassment experience marginalization, retaliation, stigmatization, and worse. (Jagsi 2018:1)

In this context, *Activating the heart: Storytelling, knowledge sharing and relationship* is a book of fundamental importance, cogently addressing topics that range from education, medicine and social care – areas where competition and financial pressure are wreaking havoc – to issues of policy-making, activism, and artistic practice. The introduction sets out an ambitious programme, on the basis of a lucid diagnosis:

[...] scholars seeking to develop their skills and to gain proficiency in alternative modes of engagement face many hurdles. The result is a radical impoverishment of our social, political, and environmental imagination. In this respect, *Activating the Heart* is timely, in that the collection seeks to make room for a different kind of education, one that builds necessary ties between community and academia to engender a space for broader, non-oppressive education models. (p. xi)

This argument will resonate deeply for readers who are aware of the impoverishment of our collective imagination as “the unanswerable logic of markets, economic necessity and bottom lines becomes a new fundamentalist religion that turns organisations into a place of darkness, where emotional brutality is commonplace and different forms of psychological violence, dehumanisation, including degradation, humiliation and intimidation, have become the norm” (Gabriel 2012:1142). In research, we see around us monocultures of similar-looking journal articles and handbooks (“cookie-cutter research”), within an impoverished ecosystem obsessed with ratings:

[N]eoliberal individualism, shaped by management tactics that constantly measure individual performance and output, is making academia an increasingly insecure place for work and study. The consequences of this insecurity include mental health problems among both students and staff, intensifying competition at the expense of collegiality and collaboration, and an overall decrease in the quality of academic jobs and teaching. (Bal, Grassiani, & Kirk 2014:46)

Competition for funding has devastating consequences:

The system of selection is, when all has been said and done, simply irrational and unreasonable. [...] Those who rationalize the importance of acquiring benchmark external funding, are rationalizing an unreasonable and heteronomic system that produces tremendous numbers of ‘losers’

and a tiny number of ‘winners’. The losers can be put under increasing pressure to show that they are competitive – increasingly risking their careers and spending funds better used on research and other intellectual activities. (Blommaert 2016)

Activating the heart: Storytelling, knowledge sharing and relationship contains no direct indictment of the academic “rat race”: In the book’s perspective, “slow science” and “désexcellence” (Gosselain 2011; Cunningham & MacEachern 2016) *go without saying* – as they really should. Instead of dwelling on academia-internal perspectives, the volume adopts a remarkably open approach: “[...] participants shared stories, research projects, and experiences with one another and collectively explored the role of storytelling in sharing knowledge and building understanding across different cultures and contexts” (p. xii). The editors’ thoughtfulness is evident in the way they avoid unhelpful flag-raisers: Thus, while the objective of recognizing a history of *colonization* is clearly stated, overtones of shaming and retaliation are avoided. Instead, some paths are indicated for shifting the lines and inventing a different world of relationships. In an age where our environment, *inescapably common* to all cultures and all living species, is undergoing inescapable environmental collapse (Chapron et al. 2018), there can realistically be no *expectation* of changing the world and avoiding the impending catastrophes. But one can nonetheless hold fast to *hope*.³

The second theme that I would like to mention is ethics. The topic is broached as early as the first chapter, whose title connects “emotions and ethics”. True concerns for ethics tend to be quite a different matter from meeting the codified requirements of ethics committees. Ethical dimensions of research are all too often viewed through a legalistic lens, using ethics protocols as a way to avoid liability (lawsuits). A thought-provoking article about “the moral depravity of ethics protocols” points out cases where “[e]thics protocols prescribe and require immoral, unseemly and outright rude behavior to be carried out by researchers in other societies with very different cultural norms” (van Driem 2016:244). The argument is that no amount of care in designing ethical principles can remedy their fundamental flaw: In the same way as “true morality has no time for morality” (Pascal: « La vraie morale se moque de la morale »), true ethics has no time for protocols. However, outright rejection of ethics protocols can be as bad as rigid application of culturally inappropriate protocols. Thus, the attitude of researchers who pride themselves on protecting Indigenous people with whom they work against the intrusion of legal parlance (including licenses dealing with issues of intellectual property and copyright) into their cultural universe is problematic. The visiting scholar plumes him/herself about playing the role of “cultural champion”, but this self-proclaimed role is underpinned by a patronizing attitude, covering what may be considered by local communities as “extractivist” research ac-

³This thin but helpful distinction is borrowed from Michel Deguy’s reflections on the irreversible environmental destruction that is ongoing worldwide: “[...] une disjonction de l’*espoir*, toujours déçu, et de l’*espérance* « messianique » que maintient en exercice parmi nous « contre tout espoir » le pensable désirable par la mise en oeuvres de la parole” (Deguy 2017:32) (my tentative translation: ‘distinguishing *hopeful expectations*, which are always disappointed, from the ‘messianic’ *hope* which remains active within us ‘against all hope’ thanks to our power to shape speech into *works* embodying what our thinking strives after’).

tivity (to use a term from Burman 2018). Not to mention that the offered “protection” is trifling, in view of the real pressures to which local communities are subjected. The viewpoints expressed in *Activating the Heart* are more nuanced, and characterized by healthy modesty. Applying insights from *Activating the Heart* to contexts with which I am familiar (in East and Southeast Asia) suggests that legal topics need not be avoided as taboo. Creative Commons licenses exist in the national legislation of an increasing number of countries, and providing explanations about these licenses is arguably a meaningful way to convey to consultants some information about the legal implications of the collaboration into which they enter. It matters that, by choosing a Creative Commons license, they retain their rights on the materials (the rights they grant are *nonexclusive*), and that users who make use of the materials will likewise be bound by the terms of the license. Since we live in countries where *no one is supposed to ignore the law* (« ignorantia juris non excusat »: ‘ignorance is no excuse’), contributing to people’s understanding of this aspect of the law can make good sense. It seems clear that collective efforts are required to *adapt* procedures of ethical review boards (often developed for biomedical research) to allow for a more sensitive tuning to different projects, and to different cultural and political contexts. *Activating the Heart* contains clear reminders of the importance of this task, and important insights as to the viewpoints and values that we need to advocate to bring about change in the institutional handling of ethics protocols (such as, in Chapter 5, p. 121: “if I have learned anything from Mandeville’s narratives, it is that ethics and aesthetics both are interpenetrating, inherent in the metaphysics and the pragmatics of narrative, and essential to survival”).

To conclude, this is a book which I warmly recommend to fieldworkers. In view of the impressive inventivity and *intelligence of relationships* displayed throughout this brilliant volume, it is to be hoped that similar workshops, in Canada and elsewhere, could be the seedbed for constantly renewed cross-disciplinary fertilization. The stakes are high, not only for researchers’ work, but also for our lives as citizens in today’s deeply divided (and globally threatened) human societies.


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